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MISSISSIPPI MOTORING: MOM AND POPS AND ENTREPRENEURS

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Southern Studies
The University of Mississippi

by

ERIN E. SCOTT

August 2014

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, motorists driving “off the beaten path” and not on the interstate now have the treat of gaining insight into a local area’s foodways when they stop to eat. From tamales to the local fried experiment, gas stations have evolved to provide one stop shopping for the day tripper or sustenance and social interaction within a locale. The state of Mississippi has somewhat escaped the national burger or sandwich chain connected to the service station and instead has a “mom and pop” kitchen serving up often informal and local flavors.

How do these establishments make a go of it when most convenience stores and gas stations survive as franchises and as large corporations with brand recognition and homogenization? Beyond plastic wrapped food with expiration dates that go into another decade, Mississippi gas station food is unique and gives insight to local flavor and customs. This thesis explores motoring, travel culture, and Mississippi entrepreneurs. Historical background of roads and the evolution of roadside food supports contemporary oral histories and interviews of entrepreneurs from around the state.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN TRANSPORTATION LANDSCAPE.....	11
CASE STUDIES.....	26
Lynn Hewlett and Taylor Grocery.....	28
Bubba O'Keefe and Stuckey's.....	32
Onward.....	38
Fratesi Bros. Grocery & Service Station.....	41
Mammy's Cupboard.....	46
Mak's.....	49
Vine Brothers.....	53
Oxbow Restaurant and Catering.....	56
Crave.....	61
Blue and White.....	65
Survival.....	70
Works Cited.....	83
VITA.....	88

LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig 1 Home Oil Co. Vicksburg, Miss. (Tisch)
- Fig 2 Morrissey's Storage Garage, Vicksburg, (MS Archives)
- Fig 3 Commerce Street, Aberdeen, MS (MS Archives)
- Fig 4 Whitworth Avenue, looking North, Brookhaven, (MS Archives)
- Fig 5 Visisble Service Station, Clarksdale, MS (Tisch)
- Fig 6 Montage from Top right: Paradise Point Cottages and
Restaurant (MS Archives); Caravan Truck Stop (Tisch);
Monte Cristo (MS Archives); Gulfhaven Trailer Park
(MS Archives)
- Fig 7 Taylor Grocery (Personal Collection)
- Fig 8 Onward Store Montage (Personal Collection)
- Fig 9 Mammy's Cupboard (Personal Collection)
- Fig 10 Mammy's Cupboard (Personal Collection)
- Fig 11 Mak's (Personal Collection)
- Fig 12 Vine Brothers (Personal Collection)
- Fig 13 Oxbow Restaurant and Catering (Personal Collection)
- Fig 14 Oxbow Restaurant and Catering (Personal Collection)
- Fig 15 Crave (Personal Collection)
- Fig 16 Crave (Personal Collection)
- Fig 17 Blue and White (Personal Collection)
- Fig 18 Pumping to Please (Personal Collection)

I. INTRODUCTION

When moving to Mississippi, my early internet research challenge was to find food recommendations. One blogger rated pimento cheese and stated that the best place to purchase in Oxford was at a BP gas station with a store called James Food. After all my travels across Mississippi, I have discovered this is typical for any town in the state. When driving in Natchez, I smiled and thought, "No one in Mississippi questions a sign on the corner advertising hot tamales and hamburgers made to order outside a store named *The Donut Shop*."

Although there are gas stations across America serving food, many of the great places to eat in Mississippi are unique. Gas stations are often the ONLY place to eat in the smaller communities. Small and family-owned establishments in Mississippi must constantly adjust to stay in business. What works in one region may not work for another. These businesses benefit from transient populations in a number of different ways. This thesis is about the creative spirit of small business in Mississippi gas station food and how these

establishments and entrepreneurs survive. Chapter 1 introduces dining out culture and American eating trends as well as southern and road food. Chapter 2 addresses history and background to roadside culture, motoring and southern food entrepreneurs. Chapter 3 incorporates interviews to investigate how entrepreneurs throughout Mississippi have adjusted to the local climate of a rural or small town economy. After these case studies, I end with a discussion of the future of these establishments and what the gas station food business might look like in the next few decades. Industry literature and representatives see potential and growth but survival of the smaller towns and eateries of Mississippi looks doubtful, always in dire balance of promise and depression.

"I'm so hungry I could eat a sandwich from a gas station," says Chevy Chase's character, Clark Griswold, in the 1983 movie, *Vacation*. Thirty years later, the joke still works. Our preconceived notions are that gas stations and oil companies are dirty and smelly but the public has to fill their tanks. From doctor's wives or ladies who lunch to workmen and locals who have always been going to the corner store, gas stations feed those adventurous enough to see beyond the pump and walk into the convenience store. These mom

and pop kitchens and ambitious upstarts are continuing the tradition of service, established mid-twentieth century, where the corner store knows your name and you're greeted with a smile.

"That [line] was very funny back then," Jeff Lenard, vice president for strategic initiatives at the National Association of Convenience Stores, said, "but I'm not sure how many people would be in on the joke now. We think food is the future of gas stations. People now know they can get a great meal from a truck, and it has expanded the horizons where people no longer expect a good meal can only be found at a place with a tablecloth." (Rosenwald)

Adventure and road trips are familiar to Americans. From the early days of the automobile, vehicles took to wagon and auto trails, often marked by burgeoning car clubs. Driver, machine and road attraction became linked in the 20th Century, as the liberation of owning and driving a car defined American culture. Entrepreneurs looked to entice and grab transient business with motels, filling stations, and convenience stores that were developing next to the newly paved blacktop, in response to the rise of motor travel. Roadways like the Lincoln Highway, Dixie Highway and Route 66 served to connect rural and urban hubs transcontinentally. The road-side stop

harkens and connects back to fair and exposition stands. Many of the snacks like hot dogs and hamburgers that are today's road food staples nod back to quick bites "first popularized at fairs as exotic dishes served at stands" (Jakle, "FastFood, StockCars" 100). Travelers, be they on the road or at a World's Fair, have always felt the need to take something back from the experience. From postcards and trinkets to our current web 2.0, Twitter, Foresquare and Instagram food-sharing culture, entrepreneurs have found a way to capitalize on these experiences.

In the 21st century, motorists driving off the beaten path now have the treat of gaining insight into a local area's foodways when they stop to eat. From tamales to the local fried experiment, gas stations have evolved to provide one stop shopping for the day-tripper or sustenance and social interaction within a locale. With few interstates carving out territory in Mississippi, the state has somewhat escaped the national burger or sandwich chain connected to the service station. Instead many of these filling stations have a "mom and pop" kitchen often serving up local flavors.

The automobile has given freedom and autonomy to the population for many decades. There are no more time tables and set stops (Jakle and Sculle, *Motoring* 4). The car has become

"that indispensable amplifier of human mobility" (Jakle and Sculle, *Gas Station* 1). Although gone are the days of full service, free amenities, and traveling in style, so are the days of the next generation eager to get a driver's license, once seen as a rite of passage. Teenagers no longer cruise in cars on a Friday night as depicted in the film, *American Graffiti*. The future of car companies depends on adjusting to a generation that sees less importance in getting a driver's license at sixteen. Over the past thirty years, teens getting their license has dropped twenty percent (Degroat). Many would rather ride share or take public transit and see less importance in purchasing a car, especially with the current economy still teetering with uncertainty when it comes to money, inflation and joblessness ("Drop"). One *Forbes* article reports, "while overall U.S. food prices rose about 5% last year, (2012) earlier in the year, food inflation was the highest recorded in 36 years. The USDA sees food prices rising 2.5%-3.5% in 2012 but many believe that inflation could be much higher" (Odland).

People are still eating out, but many restaurateurs fear that dining may soon become only a "special occasion" activity and fight to keep price points reasonable to stay viable. Some restaurateurs see the rising cost of protein as a

constant problem in keeping a price point agreeable to customers and making a profit. In a BBC interview with staff writer for *The New Yorker* and author of the new book, *Anything That Moves*, Dana Goodyear speculates that many American "survivalist techniques...[like the current] canning and pickling movement...looks [to be an] anxiety about the future" (Morris). Interested in "extreme foodies" in America, the book explores the implications of industrialized farming, how we eat as a society, and how our food choices are becoming part of our social identity. "The food movement is responding to the 20th century American way of eating, which is an industrialized food system that focuses...on a couple of plant and animal species. Foods of poverty were being recast as foods of the elite...what does it mean that the richest diners of the world are borrowing tricks from the poorest diners in the world? People are putting food back in the center of their lives and making food and food preferences part of their social identity" (Morris).

Far from the high end of dining experiences, food at any price point still has to taste good and have value. The remnants of how Americans lived in the last century remain, and people are still on the road for work and leisure, meaning there is a need to fuel cars and people. Mississippi gas

stations are the last bastions of local food at the country stores".

Drive by or stop at a gas station for lunch and the likelihood of a home-cooked meal or plate lunch is high, with many workmen filling up on sustenance to continue with afternoon labor. In a time where the Southern "meat and three" seems to be disappearing, the corner store may be how this tradition will survive. These Mississippi establishments are often the only thing in the community or what remains of a memorable thriving community.

In a Food Network episode of *The Fabulous Beekman Boys*, the owners of Beekman 1802 take a road-trip off their farm in upstate New York and head to North Carolina to pick up heritage breed sheep. Brent Ridge, while sitting in the passenger's seat says to his partner Josh Kilmer-Purcell, "There's a good southern sign. Good Country Cookin'. Speaking in Southern means you have to drop the 'G' off of everything. Good Country Cookin'" (Blacksheep). So, what is country cooking?

Alton Brown In the introduction of *Feasting on Asphalt*, tells of his family's move across the United States as a child. He writes, "We kept to family owned establishments...as the landscape changed, so did the people and the food they

cooked...to this day, I believe that the most important food experience you can have, besides with your own family, is to break bread with strangers...Fast Forward 40 years and road travel ain't what it used to be. Eisenhower's Autobahn, national food chains and automobile manufacturers have taken us...out of the realm of Kerouac and into the world of Dune" (8-9).

Authors Jane and Michael Stern share a similar sentiment with Brown. They look at these places with a fondness. "It is an America of roadside diners, lunch counters, and neighborhood cafes, where the Dagwood burgers and mile high lemon pies are prepared with flair and passion unequalled by a five-hundred-dollar-a-plate dinner in New York's poshest restaurants... They are the glue that holds a community together...[they] are isles of human interactions in an area of anonymous fast food... [it's] a way [to] express...heritage and sense of self" (Stern ix-x).

Now in an anniversary reprinting, *White Trash Cooking*, seconds that sense of self. Quickly a best seller, this small press book was no joke or tongue in cheek. Author Ernest Matthew Mickler collected many recipes that are often simple but tried and true and his response to the title that offended some, "There's white trash and there's White Trash. Manners

and pride separate the two.”(Anderson) Many urban or extreme foodies might sneer at road-food or gas station food as beneath them, but Ronald Johnson disagrees in his quote in the front of the book on a page of praise, saying, “I’d stop and eat in any of these kitchens, rather than Colonel Sanders or Chez Panisse, for the talk alone”(Mickler, iv).

The rise of a quick bite to eat relates to the quick preparation, relatively low cost, and appeal to a large majority of transient customers who seek “security in standardized products and services” (Jakle, “FastFood, StockCars” 93). This security, especially in the commercialization and franchising of stores comes from familiarity and knowledge that walking into a shop in Fresno, California has the same price, taste, and consistency in Franklin, Tennessee. In the roadside landscape, gas stations were the first to standardize (even independents banded together to ensure a positive experience). Tourist homes, campgrounds and cabin courts (distant relatives to motels) didn’t standardize until mid century, and food establishments standardized even later. It wasn’t until the 1950s that food franchises of any size began to emerge, correlating with a postwar economic boom in cars and families eating out more (Jakle, “FastFood, StockCars” 94). By the 1970s, gas stations

and eateries, once combined for economy of stops, started to separate but remerged and rebranded in the 1990s with big food chains placing smaller versions of its franchise in a gas station. Many of these are along an interstate where supply trucks can get to them. With community support and tradition, the independent kitchen in Mississippi can persist due to lack of competition from chains.

II. EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN TRANSPORTATION LANDSCAPE

The birth of the car became a great catalyst of change in the American landscape. Cities once designed for pedestrian and horse and buggy traffic quickly adjusted to become automobile friendly spaces. Technology, like electric rail and automobile, enabled people to live further geographically and commute into urban hubs. When suburbs and urban sprawl developed, the automobile was quickly regarded as a modernist invention that freed folks from timetables and let them roam beyond the tracks.

In its infancy, the horseless carriage was a hobby for the elite. Early North American automobiles were advanced extensions of bicycle technology compared to the European models that took inspiration from the French wagon (Jakle and Sculle, *Motoring* 7,9). Early inventors had many ways of propelling and powering cars, from steam to kerosene, to gas, with gasoline eventually becoming the clear winner.

Henry Ford, a chief engineer at Edison Electric, left his position to start his car manufacturing company (Witzel 11). In 1906, Ford rolled out the Model N with great gas mileage

(twenty miles per gallon) and a "moderate price tag of \$600." (Witzel 28) Two years later Ford introduced the Model T, making it a commodity (Jakle and Sculle, *Motoring* 9) at a price affordable to most. Ford produced the Model T for nearly twenty years. Over that time, the assembly line idea made automobiles a possibility for every man, especially the middle class. The first Model T's were sold for \$850 and in its last years, could be purchased for \$290. "By that time, one assembled automobile was rolling off the assembly line every twenty-four seconds, creating a total of 120 new cars every hour the factory worked." (Witzel 28-29) "By 1925, affordable automobiles and decent roads had become commonplace," (Witzel 57) and the supporting businesses "would have to materialize all along America's unfolding roadscape," where "the automobile was considered a necessity for modern life." (Witzel 29)

Before mass production and Ford, early cars were "owned by doctors, lawyers and the upper elite of society" (Witzel 12). Driving was a fair weather endeavor for early motorists and provisions few and far between. Before World War I, Picnics along the road were often the only option (Jakle, "FastFood, StockCars" 98). A day out motoring was an adventure. Early motorists needed "an intimate knowledge of

where to obtain the combustible fuel needed to keep one's vehicle in motion." (Witzel 12-13) It was a "prerequisite to any sort of extended travel." (Witzel 13)

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Mississippi car ownership jumped from twenty to one thousand registered cars, though few cars were on the road before the first World War. "From 1914 to 1919 Mississippi experienced a thousand-fold increase in the number of registered motor vehicles... [and] by 1929 well over a quarter million Mississippians owned motor vehicles" (Lesseig 4).

Cars took to old wagon trails and even unmarked trails making mud an obstacle. These contraptions left the driver and passenger exposed to the elements (Jakle and Sculle, *Motoring* 10). Exposure wasn't the only issue. Ninety percent of roads were unpaved (Witzel 13). "Dust was the big problem, next to mud." (Jakle and Sculle, *Motoring* 58) Advancements in materials were different depending on the region. Use of straw and shells was an improvement on mud. It was only later that oil, blacktop, macadam and asphalt were used as paving.

Before mass production became common, customer demand was so low that there were almost no gas stations. Fuel was purchased in mercantiles and often at bulk depots on the outskirts of a town. The refueling depot had "a dangerous

reputation, accounting for [its] location far away from densely inhabited areas." (Witzel 15) Since outposts were few and far between, many on excursion found themselves "towed the



Fig. 1

last few miles to a fuel depot by a sympathetic horse and buggy owner." (Witzel 13) As early as 1900, wholesale jobbers were also transporting

"gasoline in horse-drawn tank trucks to commercial customers in town who stored and sold fuel" (Witzel 15). When Gulf used this method of delivery, in an early mode of branding, they painted their trucks orange, something that would continue into modern times (Witzel 18).

As a fair weather hobby, many found it necessary to have a place to put the vehicle, similar to livery stables. A garage was needed for

Fig. 2



storage in the winter (Jakle and Sculle, *Motoring* 10). Pumps were often placed in the back of a garage for fueling needs.

Early road technology and standardization resulted in painted lane stripes, banked curves, wider lanes, and research into how clear sight lines needed to be for a driver (Jakle and Sculle, *Motoring* 66). Drivers needed highways to be numbered and signage needed to be posted and easy to read (Jakle and Sculle, *Motoring* 54). The 1910s and 20s meant that most construction by the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR), “focused on upgrading pre-existing routes, not on creating completely new roads on new rights-of way” (Wells 214). It was not until mid-twentieth century and the advent of the Eisenhower Interstate highway that a new roadway system would choke business on older roads and create an entirely new, busier landscape for business.

While early car design took cues from the horse carriage, evolution of design provided greater comfort to driver and rider. Motoring became a year round activity once the car became enclosed. “Motorists began using their cars in ways that altered how motorists understood and interacted with the natural world. In particular, newfound mobility fostered a recurring quest for closer contact with nature. The National Park Service and state park departments created extensive,

car-oriented facilities that welcomed motorists, fostered a sense of remoteness, and put spectacular scenery on full display. In effect, closed cars allowed motorists to define nature as 'scenery' rather than as 'weather' or 'mud'" (Wells 217-9). Nature became a thing that was framed through the car windshield. One historian even coined this "windshield wilderness...unblemished natural landscapes easily accessible to (and viewable by) motorists via rustic roads crafted to blend into their surroundings" (Wells 221).

There were many experiments and views as to how this new landscape should look and be used, both in rural and urban areas. Rural areas welcomed the modernization and connection to the cities, if only for transportation of products. Farms and ranches could expand geographically, when relying on more than the railroads. The rise of catalog sales resulted from the better roads and ease of rural postal delivery.

Car culture influenced urban planning. Parkways had a renaissance in the twentieth century. Born from Frederick Law Olmsted Sr., who "coined the term 'parkway' in 1868 for [a]

road with novel design elements.” (Wells 224) These parkways separated commercial, pedestrian and recreational traffic. “The



Fig. 3

parkways were lined on either side with broad strips of city-owned park land, which gave roadways a secluded, park like feel...[and], in another break with tradition, landscaped medians divided the roadway into multiple lanes.” (Wells, 223-4) These types of parkways mostly found resurgence in urban areas like New York, but these parkways were different than regular highways, “partly because they barred trucks, buses, and commercial vehicles and partly because they spared no expense to make driving a pleasant experience.” (Wells 224) The design gave an impression of a pastoral landscape even in populated areas.

Better roads made driving easier and the affordability of mass produced autos meant more of the American population purchased cars and hit these



Fig. 4

roads. New roadside businesses popped up and competition was fierce. Dedicated filling stations, separate from mercantiles and garages started to appear in the mid-1910s. For the first time entrepreneurs saw opportunity for business from "motorists seeking a more convenient alternative to the assortment of grocery stores, hardware stores, drug stores, repair shops, machine shops, car dealers, and automotive garages that made the vast majority of gasoline sales." (Wells 174) Filling stations would soon be the prominent business and point of purchase for gasoline sales.

Through 1910, Standard Oil was the only recognizable brand for fuel, partly because it had a monopoly on 85% of the market. After its breakup, gas was generic for another decade. It wasn't until the 1920s that gas and motor products began to be branded. Names like Shell, Gulf, Esso, Pure Oil, and Marathon developed. Even independent station owners banded

together under the Spread Eagle logo (Jakle and Sculle, *Motoring* 38-41). Branding and standardization would be a way to sell customer loyalty to a transient public.

Competition between oil companies spurred creative practices. People stopping for gas were delighted to have attendants wash windshields, pump gas, give drivers maps and directions and kids candy, changing views of the gas station and grease monkey. Shying away from the days of gas shacks, uniforms and the presence of the attendant became a way to instill trust and command respect, similar to a motorist's neighborhood street cop (Witzel 59-62). The look of the uniform exuded a "level of pride and know how" and was a "visible extension of the brand (Witzel 62). And so, for many years, attendants checked oil and other fluids, topped off radiators, cleaned windshields and made sure tires were



Fig. 5

properly filled was a part of the service at the pump. "Air was always available, whether a patron decided to purchase gasoline or not." (Witzel 67)

Today, drivers now pay an automated pump, replacing the attendant. The free air we breathe is now pressurized and charged to the customer at the corner, but at the time of full service, "competition for business dictated the service." (Witzel 67)

Beyond competitive service, promotions helped with customer loyalty, especially in the 1930s when gas was cheap and more households owned cars (Witzel 57). Artifacts from this time include glassware, toys, and ticket books, a precursor to the credit card where a customer could buy a book of tickets at a reduced cost to pay later at the pump. Free maps were ways to advertise the brand and know where the next station was located (Jakle and Sculle, *Gas Station* 45).

While gas stations franchised and standardized, places to eat took longer to develop and follow this model. Many food businesses were mom and pop places before World War I and like gas stations, restaurants and motels later franchised, recognizing the power in uniformity and a stamp of familiarity and cleanliness.

Eating out and on the go is somewhat of a twentieth century development. Travelers (mostly male) on the go were finding bites in saloons for "lunch". During Prohibition, women ventured into what was once predominantly a male space

to drink in speakeasies. With Prohibition, saloons and their food almost instantly disappeared with the loss of alcohol sales. It wasn't until after the repeal of Prohibition that many predominately male establishments like saloons/bars and eateries became a place for mixed company, catering to women and families, attempting to give a homelike experience (Jakle and Sculle, *Fast Food* 23). The rise of quick service restaurants and tea rooms took the place of early "bar-food". Beyond the American safari mentality of packing food and fuel in early motoring, tea rooms were another option for food. Tea rooms and taverns were some of the earliest eating establishments for motorists in a time where it was still an elite and fair weather past time. The term was broadly used. Roadside tea rooms were often small, but others in cities and town main streets could handle larger crowds. Many of these places, especially in the Northeast, were day trip destinations, in a time where one still had to plan and pack extra fuel and tools to repair breakdowns that might occur. Many of these motorists saw a day out with a visit to a tea room as an escape to a time before industrialization. It was a dreamy vision of the pedestrian traveler on the road, stopping at a tavern for food and lodging. Played up with rustic touches of exposed beams, these establishments were often

converted farmhouses, grist mills, or restored taverns that served light fare of coffee, tea, sandwiches and deserts. All were opportunities for female entrepreneurs to make money. They often catered to families or leaned toward a majority female clientele.

One such Southern entrepreneur was Jennie Benedict in Louisville, Kentucky. Caterer, cookbook author and culinary school trained, Benedict found an acceptable way to earn a living for her family, while also creating a regional staple with her namesake, Benedictine Spread. This green signature sandwich filling is made with cucumber, onion, cream cheese and a touch of food coloring that has been called the cousin to pimiento cheese. It is a staple of tradition for Kentucky Derby celebrations and other Louisville events.

With many economic classes on the road, the larger driving population viewed tea rooms as a place for the elite. The growth of automobile sales to the lower middle class meant new business opportunities. These new middle class drivers wanted inexpensive, quick food, so the roadside stand began to appear. Taking cues from fair and carnival booths, the roadside stand is the grandfather to modern fast food franchises. These stands were often seasonal like the early habits of motorists and usually had a common front of a window

counter that could be shuttered to close and secure the stand. The roadside stand quickly moved further back from the road, so motorists could park in front. Most roadside stands were utilitarian rectangle shaped buildings that could be easily built or ordered pre-fabricated. This was a time where banks saw road business as a risky venture and would not finance them, so these early businesses needed to construct buildings that a bank could see as useable for other purposes if the business failed.

Now for over one hundred years, complaints of a visually littered roadway have been murmured. From early days of roadside entrepreneurs, the general population expressed complaints toward the shack landscape of food and gas. The first filling stations were little more than the pumps and a "gas shack" for the attendant. Owners saw little reason for anything more permanent or extravagant. Urban development and competitive amenities for the motorist over the early decades shaped the evolution of the roadside landscape.

Unusual architecture was one way to stand out from the road. Anything eye-catching and tantalizing was used to draw in the customer, including statues and odd shaped buildings, Chinese pagodas, Igloos and Wigwams, as well as Airplanes and Shells. Colors, recognizable signage, and uniforms were ways

to brand and create customer identification and loyalty. "By establishing customer preference for a product clearly named and readily identifiable..., companies sought to establish market penetration." (Jakle and Sculle, *Gas Station* 37)

Once road food and roadside establishments became more permanent, stands gave way to all-weather places like highway coffee shops and family restaurants. These places combined soda fountain and counter service with a formal dining room. They included places like Howard Johnson with its orange roofs and combination eatery and place to stay; along with Stuckey's one stop combination of filling up people and car tanks.

Car culture influenced other ways to dine, especially after World War II, with drive-ins and walkups. In the 1950s, drive-ins like Sonic, gave quick service, reasonable prices, and good food. Eventually the cost of labor killed the carhop and most drive-ins, gave way to more walkups and the 1970s development of the drive-through. Beyond the car and motoring mentality, paper products needed to be developed to help create the carry-out or to-go nature of these businesses.

Introduced at fairs, hotdogs, hamburgers, french fries and slices of pizza were seen as novelties and new items in the beginning of the 20th century. Soda fountains, coffee shops, luncheonettes, lunchrooms, cafeterias, automats,

diners, and drive-ins were all places for quick bites and sandwiches but road food dining evolved from roadside stands, taking their cue from fairs and expositions. These bites have now become a staple in most American diets, or at least something familiar. Americans regularly eat out, and their diet has changed with fast service items fried or from the freezer (Jakle and Sculle, *Fast Food* 22). This way of eating is now the “dietary norm over exotic indulgence” (Jakle and Sculle, *Fast Food* 22).

Fig. 6



III. CASE STUDIES

This section is an example of convenient sampling, starting from a social media question, asking about "best gas station food in Mississippi." Many native Mississippians enthusiastically shared food memories, and the answers created a starter list for my research. I was a Mississippi outsider, familiar with business and entrepreneur stories. Case studies of "mom and pops" were made possible through social media, word of mouth, and friendly recommendations. It was my hope that the story would be about the plate lunch in its "natural environment", and that the gas station would be a place where this "endangered" food would be in a conservation state or in its "natural habitat" in times of changing tastes and food habits. While this may not be the case, these establishments share a creative and fighting spirit of small business owners quickly adjusting to stay viable as well as locals and tourists in the know, patronizing these establishments.

In his paper for the *Journal of American Culture*, Sculle encouraged historians to see the "full potential of oral

history" (80) and its uses in academic research. "What would life-stories of entrepreneurs, managers, and designers reveal about their place in society? [It] seems apparent that oral history is a largely untapped resource promising a new social history...to be enriched by the texture of individual, human experience." (Sculle 87)

Southern Foodways Oral Historian Amy Evans writes, "While the study of foodways is now a respected academic field, it's not a fully explored theme in oral history...It might be presented as an opportunity to connect with a narrator and build trust, but it's never what brings an interviewer to the table" (Evans). In another web interview Evans also relates the desire of SFA in "celebrating the uncelebrated, exploring culture through food, and building an archive that documents the changing foodways of our region...Collectively, though, [these interviews] tell a bigger, broader, deeper story about the evolution of a particular food in the context of a certain place and time. (Maynard)

While research materials and supporting media cover the cultural geography of many roadside landscapes, the sources mostly cover well known roads like the Lincoln and Dixie Highway or "the Mother Road" of Route 66. Consumerism and motoring in

Mississippi has published research, but when it comes to the merging of food and gas stations, the writing is contemporary, reflecting the newest trends for gas stations in the twenty first century. Direct observation, visitation, and conversation were necessary to discover the history of these businesses.



Fig. 7

Lynn Hewlett and Taylor Grocery

Crowds flock to a little hamlet in Hill Country Mississippi for a catfish joint serving weekend dinner. An informal place, steeped in nostalgia, Taylor Grocery won't seat incomplete parties. They do not take reservations, and having to wait on the porch or in the parking lot is a given.

"When I was a kid, all three of these were stores. All three had gas. There were gas pumps in front of Bill's house and a gas pump right here [out] front. Everybody had gas. Were they filling stations? They weren't what we'd call a filling station back then, necessarily, because that was usually on a highway or a place where you more or less got gas, oil

changed, that type of thing. Here, they just sold gas," says Lynn Hewlett.

This description of Taylor is consistent with accounts where in the early days of motoring, fuel could also be purchased by the gallon, on grocer's shelves and other places. Many pumps were placed on street corners. Corner location remained only in rural areas since traffic jams were created by cars waiting to pump in the city, as well as a number of fiery crashes in cities. By 1907, the term "filling station" had been created, where speedy and efficient refueling became the expectation (Witzel 18).

The building for Taylor Grocery was originally a dry goods store, built in 1889 by Duff Ragland. Changing hands a number of times, it continued to be operated as a dry goods store. Servicing the needs of the area and adjusting the business. There was even a time when Elton McCain was cutting hair on Saturdays and had a barber's chair in the store.

(Taylor Grocery)

"They sold kerosene, motor oil, stuff like that. Now some of these old stores had a rack, right beside them, where people would pull up and change their oil. There was never one of those here, that I ever knew about. The emphasis was never on gas. It was just something you had here because everybody

didn't go to town every day back then. People went to town once a week," says Lynn Hewlett, speaking of a time when in this region of Mississippi, small farms and timber were sources of income and people took off Saturday afternoon and would head "to town". In Taylor, they either headed to Oxford or Water Valley. The Taylor strip of stores existed for and survived on those nearby that didn't have the transportation or provided items that people ran out of or forgot.

Hewlett's grandfather, Chandler Karr operated a general store next door that continues as a business for artist Bill Beckwith's studio. Every need was met in the community through the strip of buildings that are now mostly known as Taylor Grocery.

"When I was a kid, there were three businesses here, three stores here, all of them - everybody doing fine. My grandfather had that white building there next door; that was my grandfather's store. My great grandfather built it; he was a doctor. He built that as a drugstore. His doctor's office was right here between these two houses.[Pointing across the street] There was a little building down in there, and he built that drugstore there. It ran as a drugstore for a number of years and then it slowly evolved into a general mercantile type thing" (Hewlett).

By 1977, Jerry and Evie Wilson started cooking and selling out of the location, and the beginnings of the catfish restaurant started (Taylor Grocery). "It was always a store first, and a restaurant second. We sort of changed the direction from that part of it. We decided it was going to be a restaurant first. Basically what it amounted to was that they (the Wilsons) weren't making enough money out of the store to survive, and it occurred to Jerry Wilson that he could sell a little catfish on the weekend. It changed the whole dynamic of the deal, to where he could make enough money" (Hewlett).

Hewlett, being in the restaurant business, saw the potential with flipping the business. "If it was going to be a profitable deal, not just a 'get-by'; if you were going to make any money, you were going to make it as a restaurant, not as a store that sold catfish. I can't compete with Kroger selling milk, eggs and bread, and most of these people here now, somebody's going to town. Every day! They're gonna pick that stuff up there. They run out trying to make a cake, and the lady might run out of milk, and she might run down here and get a quart of milk or something" (Hewlett).

Bubba O'Keefe and Stuckey's

William Sylvester Stuckey summed up his view of his empire of gas station/restaurant/way-stations, saying, "I affectionately referred to the Stuckey business method as taking a bunch of good country boys and training them, giving them interest in the stores and then watching them do the finest job you've ever seen. To me, the franchisees were one of the most important parts of my business, and I looked after them" (Drinnon 113).

William Sylvester Stuckey was a rural Georgia boy, who described himself as a self made man. Looking for work during the depression, a family friend who was an owner of a fertilizer company suggested Stuckey buy up local pecans and he would market and ship them (Drinnon 14). Stuckey took advantage of the opportunity but survived as a business from short-term loans. In the beginning, he borrowed \$35 from his grandmother (many times over, often repaying her at the end of the day and re-borrowing the next morning). As he established this business, Stuckey often wrote checks after the bank closed, only to deposit money first thing in the morning (Drinnon, 15). "If I used my money too early in the day, I'd wait until the banks had closed and start writing checks. Then

I'd sell the pecans at night and be waiting on the doorstep when the bank opened the next morning" (Drinnon 18).

From humble beginnings selling pecans to a diversified large business that supported a region, the main business of one-stop, all-inclusive service was a rarity and trailblazer in days before convenience stores, self-service gasoline pumps, fast food restaurants and interstate highways (Drinnon 3). Stuckey's became the template for other one-stop franchises selling gas, snacks, candy, and souvenirs (Drinnon, 23). Like many roadside eateries, Stuckey's came from the tradition of a roadside stand. In 1936, he opened up a stand, and one day it came to him that he should add candy to the roadside sale of the pecans. At first he asked his wife to make pralines, but then they later expanded to divinity and fudge as well. Like many other stories of roadside stands, Stuckey sold the stand when winter came to a farmer who then used it as a chicken coop, with speculation that the money from the sale went on to be used as capital for the first store (Drinnon 22-23).

In an early example of how Stuckey's operated, through employee incentives, Stuckey built a second store, poaching a manager from a local grocery. The grocer had worked for \$18 per week but Stuckey paid \$12 plus the added benefit of an

apartment above the store. He offered paid utilities and fringe benefits over large salaries (Drinnon 26). He continued this idea of incentives over raises by giving interest to workers in a store as his business grew. Beyond the local store, the community of Eastman, Georgia, prospered in a time when the rest of the region struggled (Drinnon 42).

Like many in motoring businesses, Stuckey's had to adapt in order to survive, especially during World War II and rationing for the defense effort. The lack of money, tires, gasoline, and other resources created a huge decline in tourism. William Sylvester Stuckey was able to keep the original store open by arranging for a few bus drivers to make regular stops at that location through incentives to the bus drivers like ration stamps and other black market items like cigarettes and shotgun shells (Drinnon 31). To stay afloat in these lean times, the company also sold to military (Camp Stewart in Savannah) and changed packaging and delivery by selling the sweets in boxes. Through these ventures, the company was able to expand to plants in Eastman and Jacksonville, Florida, and began to sell to Riche's department stores (Drinnon 32-33).

Although there are Stuckey's to this day, with corporate buyouts and takeovers, the essence of what these stores were,

no longer exists. In Mississippi, the story of Stuckey's seems to be mostly with the O'Keefe family.

"That was their passion. Every weekend, we'd load up in a car, my mom and dad and I and we'd go to a different Stuckey's, to just see the store, talk to the manager, make sure everything's working all right and smooth with the customers," says Clarksdale entrepreneur Bubba O'Keefe. The family owned a number of Stuckey's in the area, the franchise supplementing the family income, Father selling chemicals to farmers in the Delta on the weekdays and home to the restaurant on weekends, with Mother running the Stuckey's. "She would tell me all the time, 'This is my mission for people on the road, on the highway, the traveler's,' because there weren't gas stations everywhere and there weren't places to eat. There just weren't places or restrooms and she just considered it her mission to be there for those people," O'Keefe relates what Stuckey's meant to his family.

"Traveling was a journey back then, and Mother would tell me stories that she would counsel people in despair. She was scared they were going to go across the bridge and jump off that bridge. Christmas Eve, that was one thing that really set with me was staying open Christmas Eve, because those people

were traveling to get to their house, get with family, the weather was bad. She was just like, 'we have got to be here.'"

The O'Keefe family's first Stuckey's was in Greenville. "We were on Highway 82. There was nothing when you crossed that bridge. The next stop was Dallas probably or whatever's at the state line on the other side." Business expansion came when Father met his partner Ed Connell at Rotary Club and the two invested and built a franchise in Como. They expanded to Vaiden; Jackson, Tennessee; and Forrest City, Arkansas, to name a few. Connell and O'Keefe then branched out further and had an airplane to check on longer distance investments. "They looked out West, possibly having sites in Barstow, Flagstaff, and Quartzite" (O'Keefe).

Stuckey's employee incentives of housing continued from that first store expansion on. O'Keefe relates that there was an apartment on the premises for the couple managing the franchise. The stores "were in such desolate areas that they had to live there. You're out there on the interstate. It'd be 10, 15 miles to a big town, so they just lived in their apartment in the back. You'd walk right beside the snack bar door, right through a closet, into another door, into their apartment and they had a rear entrance from the outside" (O'Keefe).

"I tell people today, it's a Cracker Barrel with a gas pump. Yeah, the pecan logs were a big draw, but the number one draw, I think, was clean restrooms. We advertised clean restrooms on every billboard, 5 miles, 2-1/2 miles, but it was clean restrooms and that was the key." O'Keefe points out the success and influence of Stuckey's, "I want my stops to count and I sure hate stopping. I like Cracker Barrel, but it doesn't have gas pumps, and I'm not interested in a 4-course meal or a big heavy meal. I want to feed the kids, let them use the restroom, and go.

The entrepreneur spirit continues in the family with a newly opened dress shop O'Keefe's wife runs, and a "teeny" hotel in Clarksdale called the Five and Dime Lofts. He relates a story of his wife wanting to close the shop early one day and the Stuckey's ideals of the past instilled the need to stay open. "You can't set an expectation of set hours and then have it be closed," says O'Keefe.

The lofts of Five and Dime are furnished short-term rentals, with a full service restaurant below, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. In each apartment, refreshments are in the fridge for each guest. In it are four Cokes, four diets, and four Sprites. "Six is too many and two isn't enough. What's most important is that those labels are facing

straight out and are lined up uniformly. If a guest sees that detail they can rest assured that other details in the accommodation are taken care of" (O'Keefe). So the legacy of being a Stuckey's family and taking care of the traveler continue in other ways for the O'Keefe family.

Onward

Some Mississippi gas stations, especially those along the "blues" highway of U.S. 61 evolved from plantation commissaries, continuing to supply and support the surrounding communities. One such store celebrated 100 years of business earlier this year under



Fig. 8

the new ownership of Mollie Van Devender, who purchased The Onward Store last year (Reed).

This is her first venture away from the success of her husband's timber business. She was ready to step out and see what she could do. Van Devender always had affection for the place, a stopover on the way to the family hunting lodge. This was something she wanted to give a little "TLC". When she heard through word of mouth that the place was for sale, she seized the opportunity. Van Devender took five months to restore and expand after the purchase. More dining was added, and the place was shingled and sided with siding from a nearby red barn. Future plans include a museum, with the focus on local hero Holt Collier and associated material on the Roosevelt Black Bear "Hunt" (Carter).

"I love to nurture and to fluff and felt like that I gave this the luster that it needed," says Mollie Van Devender.

(Articles) Mollie is a former Miss Mississippi and "avid conservationist and hunter" (Reed). "It's a great recluse for hunters during this time of year. [It's] in the middle of nowhere on Highway 61, but locals have dearly appreciated the plate lunches" (Articles).

Besides being a great break in the day for hunters, motorcycle riders make it a stop on their day trips. The business also serves farmers and other locals coming in for lunch everyday. A variety of tourists stop by either as

historians or those driving on the blues trail. Beyond motorcycle daytrippers, other bikers, bicyclists stop by on their journey from Memphis to New Orleans (Carter).

Presently, daily specials are \$7.95, which includes drink and desert, putting this businesses price of meal in-between locals only and the costlier price of a predominantly tourist audience. Manager Amber Carter says the lunch special and keeping prices low are important. "We try to make a profit but keep that margin low. We are in a poor area. Weekends and nights, we can charge a little more and sneak in that Red Snapper and Steak but during the daytime, it's important to us to keep the prices low" and the locals coming (Carter).

People come from all over the world if you check the store's guest book (Carter). Tourists come for many reasons; for some, it's just one of many stops along the blues trail but some come to Onward to see the place where the teddy bear was invented. "It's called the greatest hunt on American soil, because Teddy Roosevelt didn't kill the bear and thus the birth of the 'teddy bear',"says Van Devender (Artiles).

Amber Carter, who was brought in to run the store by Mollie Van Devender, was born and raised in Jackson and shared that she now feels part of the local scene. "When I had a problem with my truck, some of the men that eat lunch went out

and took a look, thinking it was the battery. Well, they had it diagnosed, ordered and installed the part by the end of the day." Being part of the community is important not only to manager Amber Cater but to Molly Van Deveder as well (Carter). Van Deveder gives to the community and hopes that the profits from the store can go towards organizations in the community. Currently, The Onward Store looks to be a project of preservation and passion over profit. Van Deveder comments, "Am I making a profit? Probably not, and the little bit of profit that I do make, or possibly will make this year I want to give back to the community" (Articles).

Fratesi Bros. Grocery & Service Station

Behind an unassuming modern facade lies a Delta gem that many throughout the area know as a well-kept secret. In Susan Puckett's *Eat Drink Delta*, the author explains that "locals still lament the loss of the original Fratesi's Grocery, a decrepit wood frame structure that had been a fixture along US 82 since 1941" (174).

Historical details are difficult for Mark Fratesi, but he relates, "My dad and uncle were partners in the operation. They built the store in '41, I think. My dad used to sleep where they built, not this store, but the one before it. We

built this one in '99. Same location. Exact same location. The old building had served its purpose. You could see through the floor. It was built on house blocks, and they put so much gravel around it that it stayed in the same place, as the ground around it rose up, and then it ended up being in a hole. Every time it rained, all the water would rush up, the porch would flood." Fratesi says it was time; the new construction gave way to a better kitchen and expansion on the food side of things. He describes the new property as a deli and general store versus a convenience store (Fratesi).

Over the years, the hot food has shifted as the main pillar of income over the gas and grocery. Luther Brown of The Delta Center for Culture and Learning commented on the uniqueness of the store, "It's a very unusual place because they've got that whole Mediterranean thing going with the muffulettas and paninis. Also, that family raises the freshwater prawns on their farm, so they've got various kinds of unusual dishes that people will go there and buy carry-out casseroles to take home and even serve to guests" (Brown).

The family business has been forced to evolve and change quickly. Fratesi says, "I sell a can of Coke for 75 cents, and I sell a gallon of gas for \$3.20, but I make more off of that Coke, than I do off a gallon of gas. There's so little mark-up

in gas. I could have gone up to some of the quick stops convenience stores and bought it cheaper out of their tank, than what I paid for it, wholesale.

"If it wasn't for the deli business, we probably couldn't make it. We tried a lot of different things. If something sells, I keep stocking it. If it doesn't, I'll keep changing. We don't sell any groceries anymore. Nothing like the old days. Used to, we'd probably put up 30 cases of grocery, a week. Now, maybe three or four. Cigarettes, gas, and deli, is our main drawing card" (Fratesi).

Fratesi Brothers is a Delta gas station, surrounded by large farms. Mark Fratesi says in the past the business was about selling a lot of groceries to the tenants on the farms. Like Lynn Hewlett, Fratesi points out a change in driving habits in present times. " A lot of people now have transportation, and plus it's a whole lot less people living on farms. Most of them have moved to town. Nowadays, [they] go to the Walmarts and what-not to buy their groceries. I just try to adjust. If something's not selling, I'll move it out and try to replace it with something that might sell. If it doesn't sell, I'll keep trying. You got to keep the shelves full, that's for sure. You can't under-stock. Slow death." (Fratesi)

As at Taylor Grocery, things have changed. "We had to adjust, and ended up being more of a deli. I can't compete with the larger...Walmart or a convenience store chain, I just can't. We're family owned and independent. I can't compete with their gas prices, so we try to do things other convenience stores don't. We make a lot of homemade items here to take home and cook; that's a drawing card. Homemade gumbo, homemade Italian sausages, pasta. Got pork chops, deboned stuffed chickens. We have a real big lunch crowd. We don't serve dinner or supper, whatever you like to call it. We serve sandwiches up until 7:00, but we don't do any frying or grilling that time of night. We close it (all) down at 7:00."

Mark says he returned after college, around 1975 to work fulltime in the family buisness. As for the next generation or the future of the business, Fratesi isn't sure. "I don't know who will take it over. I have two sons. I don't think either one of them want it. My brothers have children. I don't think any of them want it. I don't know; it's a lot of work. We open at 7:00, close at 7:00, five days a week. We close at 3:00 on Saturdays, and we're not open on Sundays."

Fratesi Brothers can be hard to find. GPS took me to the otherside of Greenville and to a bridge to no where. The place is located just outside the city limits of Leland. In an

undated yet older article from SouthernLiving.com, titled "An Insider's Guide to the Delta", writer Valerie Fraser Luesse tells readers, "If you're coming from Greenwood on U.S. 82 West and make it all the way to Leland, you've come too far-- Fratesi's is on the right before you get to Leland. It's a Citgo station with an outstanding deli counter inside. And around 5 p.m., the rear parking lot becomes a favorite watering hole where locals gather to shoot the breeze."

Mark Fratesi confirms the last statement, "We've had a following for years. We live right outside of the city limits, so we've got a lot of guys, a lot of neighbors and friends that come in here about 5:00, and sip on a cold beer, and hang around. All of them get back behind the restaurant, under my feet. Their daddies did it with my dad, and now they're doing it with me and my brother." (Fratesi)

Mammy's Cupboard



Fig. 9

Further down US Highway 61, south of Natchez, lies a repurposed gas station known as Mammy's Cupboard. The statuesque building was constructed by the Henry Guade family to attract motorists to what was then a Shell Filling Station. "Her skirt opened for business in 1939" (Marling 77), but some embellishments, like tray and earrings, were added later. Viewed as anything from an ugly reminder of a past white dominated world of Southern pilgrimages and a "Mythic New South" (Tourism) to a part of motoring history pop culture and a gem of roadside architecture, Mammy's Cupboard is a distinct example of "the rise of distinctive design vocabularies wrought around selected automobile oriented building types, especially restaurants." (Jakle and Sculle, *Gas Station*.30)

Built by Gaude for his wife, the building was designed by Annie Davis Bost, with an intent to attract attention along the highway, which continues today. The theme of the programmatic architecture was chosen to complement and "cater to the pilgrims" (Robins 30) visiting Natchez for The Pilgrimage. The building was constructed "seven years after the first public pilgrimages" (Robins 36). The Natchez Pilgrimage was designed by ladies of the Natchez Garden Club in 1931 where visitors tour antebellum mansions.

The place "has drifted in and out of business several times [over the years] while remaining the property of the Gaude family, serving as a gas station, convenience store, arts and crafts center, gift shop and restaurant" (Robins 40). The current business is lunch and has been served at the location since the early 1990s by Doris Kemp and family, who intended it to be a gift shop and tea house. People kept requesting sandwiches, and lunch service evolved from the many requests. The PBS Special, *Unusual Buildings & Other Roadside*

Stuff, has an unidentified interview of a man that states “if she had the same restaurant in a little flat building, she wouldn’t get the business,” reinforcing the idea that programmatic architecture’s novelty encourages motorists to stop, investigate and, most likely, take a picture.

Mammy’s Cupboard is a roadside attraction surrounded by much



Fig. 10

folklore. When discussing the stop, most people have a different comment or anecdote on her changing skin tone, how she (the building) was illuminated at night, and that at one time, she was painted to “resemble an Indian woman instead of a black slave” (Robins 40). Due to changing interests, tourism and attendance to the pilgrimage has dropped, but it looks as if the novelty of the architecture oddity has tourists and locals frequenting this repurposed gas station.

Mak's



Fig. 11

Across the state in the Piney Woods region, near Hattiesburg lies Mak's gas station owned and run by Mike King. When looking for one stop shopping this may be the place. It's bait and tackle, guns and ammo, and a kitchen. Stop in most days, walk past the cashier and stacks of carbonated drinks, and one will find mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, string beans, field peas, corn nuggets, cornbread and rolls displayed behind steaming glass. King suggested the hot ham sandwich, telling me it's the store's specialty. This hot sandwich can also be a club with a mix of three meats, three kinds of cheese, mushrooms, onions, jalapeños, mayonnaise and mustard. King says that sandwich was copied by a Fortune 500 company after drivers were taking it back to Nashville and eating it

cold, but "you can't copyright a sandwich." (King) Folklore, tall tale, or truth, this original makes the long trip to this destination worth it.

Mike King relates the realities of being a country store versus a place off the interstate. "We are feeding working people that have x amount of dollars. In the past you ate under \$5" (King).

With rising cost of food and fuel, businesses and consumers are all being hit with higher prices, be it a grocery store, country kitchen or restaurant. In less than a decade, lunch and hot food has gone from something profitable to small margins for Mak's kitchen. "You've got a lot of labor involved and you had to double your money at least [to profit], and \$4.99 was a cheap plate. Now, figure food costs in the last few weeks, its about 4 and quarter and 4.50 [dollars]. We can't charge \$9 a plate, but we're fixing to go to \$6.39. We're still not making the money that we were three years ago, and we've cut employees and cut expenses. It's a catch 22. Right now we're not making any money in the kitchen. Three years ago it was a good moneymaker for us. It's not anymore" (King).

Unlike interstate shops that have more transient customers and can charge \$9 a plate, King says, "We can't do

that because we have locals. If lunch is 10 bucks, they are going to go elsewhere... I've seen a number of kitchens like ours close down. In fact, one of my suppliers asked me about that the other day, he said, 'these gas station kitchens are closing left and right. Are you making any money?' And I said, 'No, I'm not making any money.' We cut portions back when this first started," but then King realized that "if they don't get full, they are more upset than if you charge [them more]" (King). Portions are important because the backbone of his lunch crowd are workmen that need enough fuel to get through the afternoon work demands.

Although very frank about the future of country stores and his store, King's continued success in the business has been expansion and looking at similar business models. His research consisted of going out every Friday and looking at other shops, but in recent years it sounds as if it's been a balancing act with the books. "We're not expanding. I was always aggressive and ambitious in business; I guess all business owners are. I've gotten less aggressive and less ambitious over the last few years. You quit growing, you slowly sink. That's the spot we're in...this is a dying business" (King). King spoke of smaller profit margins and a smaller kitchen staff to keep the kitchen going as well as

raising prices, but weeks after our conversation, King invested in updating and renovating the kitchen. Whatever the profits are, King is fighting and continuing to serve his community food.

Between the smaller profit margins with food, cigarettes and other supplies, one thing at Mak's is firing, and that's the guns and ammunition side of the business. "This year has been awesome with hunting. The President and the Congress have really boosted ammunition and gun sales. We sold more guns and ammunition this year than any other 3 years combined...Sales are through the roof." He says that for a while the honey bun stand "had 30 round magazines just stacked on it... we had a lot of comments from out-of-towners- like you walk in a gas station [and] you have 30 round magazines stacked at the cash register for an impulse buy" (King).

Vine Brothers



Fig. 12

Many of these country stores continue because they are a family business. One such place is in the southwest corner of the state. With a population of 1800, Centerville, Mississippi has a corner store with restaurant attached. The town and business welcome an influx of hunters visiting the region every year. "Every November, December, January, we see approximately 2,500 plus in our area." says current proprietor Benny Vine (Vine). Vine Brothers takes advantage of this influx in population with the quick food and through processing meat. "My dad started processing to supplement revenue. We have a good reputation because of our attention to detail in every step of the process and our consistency" (Herbert).

Consistency and tradition contribute to this somewhat niche market. "Some of these hunters have been shopping with us since 1979. Wild game processing is less than 10% of annual revenue but is the most profitable and occurs quickly (90% of the game processing occurs from mid-November to early February- about 12 week period)." (Vine)

Unlike other stores, Vine shares that their numbers are atypical from similar businesses. "Fast food is approximately 40-50% of our business. Fuel sales are approx. 20% of annual sales. I think most convenience stores are 65%-75% fuel sales and the remainder 'inside sales'" (Vine).

Running a family business can be difficult and Vine, who moved his family back to Mississippi, says that being the only family member operating the business day to day is probably best. Although his children aren't yet old enough, he expects the next generation to work the business. His wife contributes, but with after school activities and the family living forty miles away, she is usually there at the end of the month and a couple days a week (Vine).

Like other gas stations with hot food, the lunch crowd is "definitely the biggest", with Sunday lunch being "by far the biggest crowd" (Vine). Vine Brothers used to cater to the local prison system, but with changing budgets and other

factors, there are fewer orders than in the past. The store continues to cater to the oil rigs but not on a consistent basis. Vine says, "We are observing increased traffic in the store and restaurant from the oil fracking operations, however. It is estimated that \$300-\$400 million will be spent on oil fracking just this year in Amite, Wilkinson, and a few of the surrounding counties and parishes. I also cater large events on an annual basis for some local companies, i.e., company picnics and a community college (annual crawfish boil). I think most of our business is local throughout the majority of the year, however, we are seeing a LOT more traffic and faces we don't recognize from the oil fracking activities and construction workers from a massive wood pellet plant that is being constructed just down the highway from us in Gloster, Mississippi. A new hospital is also being constructed directly across the highway from us. Earth moving activities began (recently) and we are seeing some of those folks eat lunch with us. These are not local people." (Vine)

A shift in circumstance and the local economy shows shifting behaviors and eating patterns, with Vine Brothers reaping some of the profits from this change in tide.



Fig. 13

Oxbow Restaurant and Catering

Some family businesses last years and through multiple generations. Some end. The story of Hayden Hall is about the end of a family

oil business. Hall went off in the world and become a different kind of entrepreneur.

"We owned and operated full-service gas stations for the last 70-80 years. My grandfather turned 92 this past year. He's still doing great. He started the gas station business here, my father had a gas station, all my uncles had gas stations, and I was actually in line to be a gas station [operator], but my path took a different turn in the food business," says Hayden Hall. He and his wife Erica Eason Hall operate Oxbow Restaurant and Catering, a brick and mortar store in Clarksdale that has gone from cafe and bistro to a grocery and back to weekend restaurant, serving up food to locals and blues tourists as of March, 2014.

Hall reminisces about growing up and working at a gas station. "It was the kind of gas station where you pulled up, and a friendly face came out and filled your car up with gas, checked your oil, checked your tires, brought you bubblegum, suckers, wiped your windshield, the whole process, and you got to know [the customers]. Even then, we would have people that would sign tickets that you would just pay based on your signature. That's those days." (Hall)

It was early in the aughts that the family closed its last gas stations, ending a 70-year family business in the Mississippi Delta.

"Any time you have more service involved, there's going to be more cost. I think that's eventually what kind of hurt the little man gas station, full service. It's the big box stores saying, 'If you get gas and your groceries, you're going to save money.' I think that kind of hurt us. We washed cars, full service, oil change, everything you could think of, which I think is so important in business now is that loyalty-that's not there anymore. Now, whoever you see with the cheapest price of gas on the sign, you're going to pull into. There's no loyalty there anymore" (Hall).

"That happened not only with the trend of more self-service gas stations, but just with the whole ideology of how we do

business in general as a society these days. It also goes back to taking away the human connection, because when my family was doing this growing up, the only way you knew it was time to change your oil was because my grandfather checked your oil and said you need an oil change. Now you have a button on your car that pops up and says, 'Time to change your oil.' They didn't have that in older model cars. You relied on someone else to look after you, and now I think it's become so mechanized, which is a good thing and a bad thing in a lot of ways. I think that my family was always known for going the extra mile." Hall expresses the idea of self service and outside point of sale at the pump. "Now you walk up, swipe your card, you're out of there" (Hall).

The principles of service from Hall's gas station days are what has continued into his current business. The name Oxbow comes from the name of where a river bends and breaks its path and comes back to its origin. "That was our journey, my wife and I. We're here, we broke path, went off and did our thing and came back to where we started from" (Hall).

In the Halls' return to the Delta, the couple has brought big city influences and culinary training, a different perspective to the local food scene beyond hot tamales and BBQ.

Their restaurant (both versions) has had limited seating and a small menu with emphasis on local and in-season dishes. Gaining fame with their now famous tuna tacos, Oxbow took familiar ingredients and put a slight twist to it, winning over lunch clientele typical of gas station crowds, especially workmen and deliverymen. The introduction of different tastes and take on food means locals and media have noticed. Accolades and magazine articles are displayed and framed on the walls from Andrew Zimmer, *Travel+Leisure Magazine*, *Delta Magazine* and more.

The grocery was a much needed break for the Halls and seemed a smart move in keeping the name, the store, suppliers, and customers. As a grocery, Oxbow carried specialty foods, craft beers, and local foods like Sweet Magnolia Ice Cream, Brown Family Dairy, and produce from Beaverdam Fresh Farms.



Fig. 14

Hayden tells of his job as a teenager, working for his uncle. For one summer, he would wash and detail cars, but it was also his first experience as a cook. "I set it up on the side of my uncle's gas station, and I cooked burgers every day. I made this really nice kind of upscale burger, and I made 20 or 30 a day. My uncle got on the phone and called around to other businesses downtown. He was like my sales rep. He would say, 'Hayden's cooking burgers today. Who wants one?' I sold out every day." (Hall)

"It's all tied in for me. My food business, my love and food and food business started at the gas station, even though I didn't end up becoming a gas station man, like my family wanted me to, it still was an influence on me" (Hall).

Crave



Fig. 15

“The location that we were going to be in was actually **another** gas station,” explains Stan Gaines, a third or fourth generation gas and oil man, depending on who gets credit for the family’s first gas station (Gaines). “We had a lot of stations that were kind of competing with each other. We kind of bought out the competition, so to speak. One day Charlotte (Skelton) and I met and we talked” (Gaines). The original goal was to put a business in a vacant gas station building, yet due to multiple factors, the partnership put Crave in a location where a working business was located. “We decided to actually close a working business to put Crave in. We had the

property in 1940-ish, not exactly sure the exact year we had that property. We remodeled in 1996 and brought in a TCBY and a Little Caesar's. After the 5 year contract was over with those two companies, TCBY and Little Caesar's, we parted ways" (Gaines).

The station where Crave is now located had a colorful and long history at the corner of Davis and North St in Cleveland. "There was gas sold there until the last day of June in 2009. Sometime from 1940 to June of 2009, there was somebody there named Gaines selling gas, but we shut it down July 1st. It took us, probably, four months before Crave was up and running" (Gaines).

In the past the station had pizza and ice cream franchises, catfish, and someone selling tickets for the bus. "It was a bus stop." A bus stop where many released prisoners from Parchman took their first steps of freedom. Gaines explains, "No matter how rich you are, you don't get released at the door. Assuming, I hopefully never go there, but let's say my parents were to pick me up, you get picked up at the bus stop where they give you tickets and put you everywhere. Every single day, we'd have all the prisoners released from Parchman come through that gas station as part of a bus stop" (Gaines).



Fig. 16

Described as a “contemporary café and coffee house” (Puckett 134) and lunch only Bistro, Crave probably goes against the grain of what one would expect in the Delta and in a repurposed gas station. The bistro serves up sandwiches and salads everyday until 2 pm. Skelton also has an ever changing and rotating menu of gourmet cupcakes with names like Devil In a White Dress,

Fat Bottomed Girls, Red Velvet, Orange Julius, Chocolate Peanut Butter Cup, Southern Pound Cake with fresh strawberries, Strawberry Fields and Happy Happy Birthday as a few tempting examples.

Gaines stresses that this is unique due to Delta State University and other industries in town generating customers open to salads, gourmet sandwiches, and \$3 fancy cupcakes. He sees it as a place where ladies can lunch. Gaines pushes back on the notion from the convenience store industry that there will be more fresh food and chefs in gas stations in the near

future. There was a rotisserie and a gourmet potato bar as well as sandwiches, as examples of past food ventures at Crave's location. When Gaines tried to introduce veal, it wasn't well received, unlike at the restaurant across town. "I took the same thing that the restaurant was buying and put it there and did it at half price and literally brought the rest of the veal home because I could not sell it. Unless you're a really metro-y kind of store, you can't blend gasoline, Newport cigarettes, Bud Light, with a sushi roll. I would have a hard time believing anybody in the rural area could blend gas, cigarettes, beer, and gourmet food." (Gaines)

He sees it as a hard sell. Gaines describes gasoline as dirty and smelly and feels most people still don't see food purchased at these establishments as eateries to frequent. Only locals in the know are aware of the quality of food coming out of these establishments.

As an oilman first and food guy second, Gaines points out the transient nature that populates this business and what it means. "On a cold, rainy day, you're getting hammered, right? Nobody's coming out, nobody's doing anything, and on those days you're still buying cigarettes, and you're still drinking beer, and you're still doing stuff. The food would taper depending on the weather. You could have some bad days and

weeks or whatever. It could kind of affect your overall. When you want to choose, you generally want to choose in the gas station business fast, volume. You need tomorrow's money to pay yesterday's bills. That's kind of the way gas stations work" (Gaines).

Blue and White



Fig. 17

"People have grown up at the Blue and White, and it was always an icon as far as people that lived south of here," says general manager Charlotte Ming, a South Haven resident who loves her work so much, she's commuted to Tunica for the

past five years. Ming explains there has been a tradition of Delta folks stopping to eat on their way to Memphis to shop. "They always planned their trip around stopping at the Blue & White, whether it was for breakfast on their way in, or dinner on their way out" (Ming). She also relates that the building that has been in its current location for 75 years, celebrated with 92 year old resident Neal Block in attendance. Block attended both the original grand opening and its anniversary celebration. Along the "blues Highway" of US Route 61 lies the Blue and White, in its current location since 1937. Operated by Pure Oil Company, from 1924, the Blue and White has been a Greyhound bus stop, newsstand and full service station and restaurant. Currently owned by Steven Barbieri and Joe Weiss since 2002 (Puckett 67), the restaurant was able to get a new kitchen in part from the thriving local business and recommendations heeded by casino patrons and Battle Arena participants. The kitchen improvements enabled "improved efficiency, while keeping the old-time charm of the dining room and the menu of local favorites in tact" (Puckett 67). That "charm" may be a little bluer than in the past as the interior takes cues from its name, illuminated in neon, atop the old canopy that used to shelter the pumps.

"We get a lot of traffic from the casinos and we get a lot of word-of-mouth customers. A lot of customers that are staying at the casinos that say, 'Hey, where can we get some good home cooking? Where can we go that's not your typical stereotypical buffet?' So they'll send them here, because it is all locals that work at the casinos generally," says Ming. She always explains how to many, it's another home. Locals will call to find out who is laid out for viewing at the funeral home next door or get their news by meeting up over a cup of coffee or a meal. Known as "Fried Fridays," Fridays are one of their busiest days as well as Sunday lunch.

Who is in the kitchen is another unique feature. The Blue and White has three generations preparing meals. Sit at the counter and peek through the window to catch a possible view of grandmother, daughter-in-law and grandson cooking hamburgers, southern vegetables and fried chicken.

"I just really think a lot of people consider the Blue & White home. It's one of the few places that you can go and have locals anymore. It's not a chain. I'm not going to sell you a 99 cent soybean patty on a bun," Ming says as the McDonald's golden arches are framed through the windows of the diner. The hamburger chain, housed in a gas station, sits across the street. "I'm going to serve you a home-cooked meal,

and people can't get that anymore. Nobody knows how to cook anymore. They don't" (Ming).

Although the Blue and White has the staying power, one can expect bumpy waters in Tunica for the immediate future. What was "once the nation's third-largest casino market" will see another casino close in the middle of 2014. Caesars Entertainment closed Tunica's largest casino June 2 of this year, laying off as many as 1,300 workers with a slim chance that Caesars' other two Tunica properties would absorb the displaced jobs. Spokesman Gary Thompson told The Associated Press, "What we do have are a number of loyal players in the market, but not enough to support three properties. The biggest problem is the proliferation of gaming in feeder markets for Tunica as well as the overall impact of the recession." The hemorrhaging of profits equated to a decline in profits of 38 % over the last seven years. This and the area never fully recovered from the Mississippi River flood of 2011. Many gamblers went elsewhere and never returned (Amy).

A year ago, Ming stated that "The Blue and White is doing good. We're holding our own and we're going the way we want to be going right now. We get a huge amount of traffic from this highway out here and the majority of it is going to and from the casinos. We get a lot of repeat business from the casino.

We can feel the difference, the casinos are down, they'll all tell you that, and we can feel it. People are getting a little more choosy where they spend their dollars because of the economy and not knowing what's going to happen next. I think they are a lot more selective of where they spend their dollars out, where they choose to eat. You're going to have that clientele that still going to go to a chain restaurants and eat the value menu just because that's what they want and then there are those that are going to say, 'You know what, I'm going to spend the extra money and have a sit down meal.'" (Ming)

Although the restaurant survived the Great Depression, it is a given the closing of the casino and loss of jobs will have a huge impact on the city and county and one of its older landmarks, The Blue & White.

IV. Survival



Fig. 18

As the interstate became the artery of modern travel, franchise food and hotels clustered by the exits off the freeways. Only in the past few years have towns and businesses seen the

power of keeping money in the area. Supermarkets carrying more specialty items; the (buy) local movement and the rise of food trucks have altered perceptions and made the American public rethink hitting the national chain for a meal out with the family. "Too many people don't know what home-cooking tastes like, they are used to the taste of what comes off of a Sysco truck," says Tunica Museum Director, Dick Taylor. With the popularity of TV and travel shows, more people are encouraged to branch out or at least take the endorsement from the chef celebrity host. "Knowing something other people don't know is fun-especially when that something is food-related. And let's

be real: Anyone can flip through a Michelin Guide and dine on first-rate cuisine, provided they'll fork out the cash," states *Bon Appétite's* webpage introducing its list of "unexpected spots with great food". Car washes, furniture warehouses, bait and tackle, and Oxford, Mississippi's Chevron gas station serving up chicken on a stick, are among the list.

Tradition, word of mouth, and media are ways that these gas station entrepreneurs are surviving in a changing economy. The convenience store industry now looks at the food truck trend and predicts a future where the food truck customer and culture will venture from the pump to inside the store. For food entrepreneurs, trucks mean less cost to open their business. They pay for a place to store the truck versus paying high rent for a brick and mortar restaurant. Trucks change location and can adapt as well. For some chefs, a truck means not having to serve an evening meal, giving flexibility in hours to be with their families.

For gas stations, high rent and profit margins are similar issues to the food entrepreneur. Servicing cars, which was once a way gas stations augmented profits, has become difficult due to tight competition and more technology and computers in car design. "Slim profit margins on gasoline have forced owners to search for new ways to make money." Jeff Lenard, spokesman for

the National Association of Convenience Stores says 'We're changing from gas stations that happen to sell food, to restaurants that happen to sell gas'"(Bernstein); and Daniel Conway for the California Restaurant Association sees this trend as a natural evolution for the American car culture that begat road food. "'If you're going to have the kind of traffic associated with a gas station, you'd like to be able to tap into those customers to sell something else' "(Bernstein). Gas stations are once again evolving.

The gas station must adapt and change to survive. "As revenues from gasoline and tobacco products fall, food service sales are increasingly becoming convenience stores most profitable category" (Tahran and Lofstock 62). Cigarette sales are dropping, and fuel efficient cars mean less stops. Currently, "more than half of U.S. consumers buy food service items from convenience stores." (Tahran and Lofstock 66)

The Sheetz "family business" of Altoona, PA, is an example of a family business adapting in the new century. They were the first convenience store to win a Golden Chain Award in 2012. They are one of the "largest and fastest growing convenience-store operators in the country" (Otterbourg). Their success is due to evolution and creativity in a changing economy.

"Our problem is people unwilling to buy food at a place that sells gas," says Travis Sheetz (Otterbourg). Like most kitchens in gas stations, most of the food revenue comes from lunch, but there is a daily battle that "gasoline and decent food can't exist" (Otterbourg). The company has experimented with moving the pumps to the back of the property, stressing food and an eatery with more prominence, as well as adding drive-through service. By incorporating strengths of other popular food chains, Sheetz Family gas stations could become models for the possible future of gas station food, backing up the survey referred to by Tahran and Lofstock where "customers indicate that the ability to get in and out quickly contributes to where they will shop when they are looking for a quick, on-the-go snack." (66) Current choices for these customers are "hot prepared foods, grab-and-go items, microwaveable foods, prepared deli sandwiches and food from a chain located inside" (Tahran and Lofstock 66).

The Sheetz Chain has capitalized on "the bigger prize [of] America's fourth-and favorite-meal: snacks. Hence the popcorn chicken and the fried pickles and the sliderz, with the Sheetz "z", all available anytime of the day or night" (Otterbourg). So it seems as if lunch and "fourth meal" are two constants with customers eating at gas stations.

The Tahran and Lofstock article notes that small gas stations customers, like those in much of Mississippi, eat hot lunch almost twice as much as large gas station patrons. However, large station customers are more likely to have breakfast and dinner in the larger establishments than small gas station customers (Tahran and Lofstock 66). This likelihood to frequent lunch at small gas stations reinforces observations for Mississippi that in many small communities, a gas station country kitchen is the only choice to dine out within the community.

Small stations may catch up to the large stations where breakfast is the next battlefield. In the last few months, Taco Bell has entered the breakfast market, along with other fast food chains. Americans are on the go. "Twenty percent of all American meals are eaten in the car and they spend ten percent of their disposable income on fast food every year." (11 Facts) According to Alison Griswold's article on breakfast wars for *Slate.com*, "From 2007 to 2012, breakfast sales in the U.S. rose by an average of 4.8 percent a year, while other restaurant sales remained essentially flat, Technomic data shows."

Gas station food defines many rural areas and that description defines much of Mississippi. Most visitors,

especially food and travel bloggers, are surprised to find that some of the best eats for locals are in a gas station. Drive by many of these kitchens at breakfast or lunch and you will see a number of service trucks and van parked in front, while their drivers enjoy good, local, southern food. The gas station convenience store is the modern day mercantile where people gather and pick up quick incidentals.

Yet, Delta Cultural Center founding Director Luther Brown agrees there is a risk. At a franchise, "you basically know what the recipes are going to be or what the menu's going to be, what it's going to cost, and how it's going to be prepared. Whereas you see a little gas station or a place like Fratesi's where it says, 'Live minnows,' and you don't know that you're going to get wonderful food when you go in there, if you're the traveling public. You sort of have to be on the inside to know that that's a desirable place to go and eat. You certainly wouldn't know that you're going to get fresh Delta raised, freshwater prawns in wonderful sauces that are honestly Mediterranean" (Brown).

Brown points out a lot of other small country stores that don't sell gas. But they do sell relatively fast food. "They may make it in-house but basically, it doesn't take long to

prepare a lunch kind of thing. I'm thinking, for instance, of Hoover's in Baptist Town. It's a very poor black neighborhood in Greenwood and they basically provide all the services in their little shop. There are some washing machines and dryers. They sell everything from malt liquor to sodas and lots of Little Debbie type things, but Mary Hoover also makes hamburgers. They've got Bar-B-Qued ribs and good side dishes like macaroni and cheese and baked beans and that kind of thing. They're also sort of the community center because everybody hangs out at Hoover's" (Brown).

And for Mississippi, especially in the Delta region, with population in decline and stores and restaurants closing, kitchens in gas stations will probably go away and/or gas stations will be few and far between. Hayden Hall of Oxbow also works in food distribution and shared a client's business model in Clarksdale, the same town as his restaurant and catering business. Like Hoover's in Baptist Town, this business doesn't sell gas either. "It's a convenience store that sells deli food, beer, cigarettes, your necessities, as well as takes EBT cards. Then next door to it is a liquor store. This is all one building, one place. Liquor store, laundromat, and then your check cashing place. It's all right there - what you need, and it's just so interesting how that's

all evolved in this area, because it's a one-stop shop for the way a lot of the money is given and spent in this area" (Hall).

"It's a good way to catch your clientele. You catch them when they come cash their checks. You also take EBT cards. You can only buy cold food with EBT cards. You can't buy hot food. They get around that a lot, say like cook a pizza and put it in a cold box and even warm it up in the microwave, whatever" (Hall).

Stan Gaines of Cleveland, business partner in Crave, has a gloomy forecast on the future of these multi-generation, family owned businesses. "There's not a chance. My daughters are seven and five. It would be so oddball for something like that to still be here when they get out of hopefully Harvard or Yale or wherever they go. In twenty years from now, there's no chance in the world that what you're writing about will exist" (Gaines).

During our interview, Gaines laughed at my research, recalling a paper he wrote on mule farming while he was in college. "I interviewed people who grew up on my farm or other people's farm who actually mule farmed. Your gas station, gourmet food [paper] will be as relevant as a mule farm in

twenty years. You're just not going to find them. No chance" (Gaines).

He thinks the "country kitchen" will lose out to the informal economy (especially in the Delta). "For me to go to Sysco and order a case of pork chops, (etc.)..., you can't beat the woman who cooks really good out of her house and one day goes to Kroger, one day goes to all the different meat places and her menu is going to vary based on what is the hot item at one of these cheap grocery stores. She doesn't really factor in her time picking up all these things or going to 15 different grocery stores" (Gaines).

"In the end, you've got to be in that six, seven, eight dollar range, depending if you're doing a drink and everything else. She's going to be more in that four and five dollar range because you're paying the taxes, and the insurances, and the health codes, and all that, she's just going to beat you up and ultimately you're going to lose. You decide just to get rid of the plate lunches. That is the exact reason that we got out of plate lunches for each of the six locations that we were in. You ultimately could not beat that girl. Even when that girl got a better job, there was another girl who had come in" (Gaines).

Gaines also mentioned Walmart and the discount gas outside of Walmart. Just as Walmart can be seen as a factor in the death of main street America, a place where the five and dime originated, the international corporation is in a position to crush family owned gas and convenience stores.

"Murphy Oil is in front of Walmart. Murphy Oil has [oil]wells in America. [The] average price of getting it out of the ground is like \$20 a barrel. We're like \$90 today... By the way, they own the pipeline and they actually own the trucking company as well. They do it all. Now, they pay to sit out in front of the highest trafficked place in town and Walmart says one thing, 'Don't let anybody sell cheaper than you.' They've got a software that can actually grab your credit card ... They can't tell anything about you but they can tell you what you paid for your product, [and] they can change their stuff on a dime" (Gaines). He also explained that while he and other businesses pay 3 percent for credit card banking services, Walmart is so large that it is able to process in-house.

He also says that Walmart doesn't care what the price is, that they just want to sell, meaning if you're that large, you can take a loss on some products, draw a customer in, and have the loss absorbed through the total the customer pays on all

purchases. Using the analogy of beef, he explains, "If you own the cow, the pasture, the butcher, the processor, everything, the only way you lose money is if you don't sell hamburgers in the end. You can sell your hamburgers at a loss and still make tons of money" (Gaines). And the practice of reducing a price of one thing and absorbing it through profits somewhere else continues.

Days after that explanation from Stan Gaines, Walmart opened a test format in Bentonville, Arkansas. Described as a hybrid, senior Vice President of Small Formats, Debra Layton said, "I would consider it a food store that sells fuel." Walmart has done its research. Like many of the stores used for this paper's research, Walmart to Go has what other gas station convenience stores have, including a "local" mom and pop business, Bentonville Butcher and Deli, inside. "We've partnered with Bentonville butcher who is a local business and they're providing breakfast lunch and dinner options for the customers that are on the go," Layton told *Arkansas Matters*. She states that while there are no plans for expansion, "you never know" (Arkansas Matters).

Blogger Al Hebert told reporter Rosenwald, "The average person just fills up their tank, pays with a credit card and drives off, but if you just walk a few feet from the pump to

the store, you might discover one of the best eating experiences of your life”(Rosenwald).

While this may be true, convincing the general public to take that risk is a hard sell. So what is unique to the Mississippi gas station and country store will probably disappear or only a few will survive in the next few decades. What is typical for rural Mississippi will probably be adopted in urban areas across America. With the taco truck and trailer craze gaining momentum, foodies are looking for that next great bite. Even locally, in Oxford, Chef Corbin Evans has opened Oxford Canteen, a place described as a truck without wheels. A walk-up window in between two buildings, Oxford Canteen has the same elements as trucks and gas stations- a place to serve food with less overhead from having a traditional brick and mortar restaurant.

With a big competitor like Walmart looking to take on the gas station model, evolving from kiosk to full amenity convenience store, it's only a matter of time and corporate decisions for the small town gas station to survive. Being undercut from big business and non-commercial kitchens, many of these rural country stores will have to evolve to stay competitive. It will take more energy and more creativity from

the independent business to survive. In college towns and urban settings, you will most likely see a rise in "gourmet gas stations", where one can find gifts and plenty of wonderful food cooked fresh and prepared daily. As restaurant ventures become even riskier, the safety of sharing a building with a established traffic footprint makes sense, especially for chefs with families that wish for different hours and time with their families. The country stores that will continue into the next decade will survive through creative entrepreneurship, tradition, and community.

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